

Bush Reviews U.S. Options On Lithuania

Soviets Urged to Stop 'Escalation' of Crisis

By Ann Devroy
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HAMILTON, Bermuda, April 14—President Bush and his top aides today renewed their call for the Soviet Union to stop "this escalation of tensions" with Lithuania as senior officials worked on an updated list of possible U.S. responses should the Soviets carry out their threat to impose an economic blockade against the breakaway Baltic republic.

Secretary of State James A. Baker III, preparing to leave here to return to Washington today, called the Soviet move "an escalation" and added: "It's a threat but only a threat. It remains to be seen if it is carried out."

"We are doing everything we can in terms of making sure the message is clearly and loudly received that this would have, if it were in fact carried out, an adverse impact, naturally, on our relationship," Baker said in an interview with Cable News Network.

Neither Baker nor other senior officials would say publicly what options Bush is considering in response to a Soviet embargo. A senior official said Bush's crisis management team, the so-called deputies committee, has met several times since Lithuania declared its independence last month to discuss potential Soviet moves in Lithuania and what responses the United States could make.

Following the Soviet embargo threat Friday, an official said, Bush asked senior officials from the National Security Council, State Department, Central Intelligence Agency and Defense Department to review and update the options prepared by the deputies.

Officials described most of the options as "not surprising"-type moves such as cutting off certain lower-level meetings between U.S. and Soviet officials and halting steps aimed at improving the Soviet economic system such as granting the Soviets observer status at international trade talks.

An official who called the latest Soviet move against Lithuania "very sophisticated psychological pressure" said the deputies group had discussed the embargo threat as a logical step for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in his escalation of pressure against Lithuania. "We are prepared for this to happen," said the official, adding that the deputies referred to it as the "turn-off-the-lights" ultimatum.

The deputies group was set up by Bush after the failed coup attempt in Panama as a senior-level, inter-agency crisis management operation. It consists of the second-ranking officials in the major national security agencies.

The senior official who spoke with reporters said canceling the planned summit between Bush and Gorbachev "is an outcome both sides want to avoid." Such a move, he said, would delay agreement on the strategic and conventional arms treaties both countries seek and would slow progress on a number of other issues.

Bush declined to answer questions on Lithuania asked by reporters who accompanied him on a wet, windy round of golf here in Bermuda, where he had held talks with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. He returned to Washington later today.

An official said U.S. officials in Moscow, responding this morning to a request by the president, had provided him a more detailed analysis of the Soviet boycott announcement. Baker, in his interview, held firm to the U.S. position that the Lithuanian crisis should be solved with dialogue and that there should be no further "escalation of tension."

Baker refused to discuss what the United States might do if the Soviets follow through on the ultimatum, but he said, "Clearly the American people would never understand it if the Lithuanian people were deprived of basic necessities."